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FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 0168
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3719
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PRIORITY 0004
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY 0021
INFO RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON 0016
RUEHBH/AMEMBASSY NASSAU 0033
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 0008
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 0026

UNCLAS HAVANA 000744

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CCA, WHA/EX
STATE FOR USAID/OFDA ROB THAYER
SAN JOSE FOR USAID/OFDA TIM CALLAGHAN
BRIDGETOWN FOR USAID/OFDA JULIE LEONARD
USMISSION GENEVA FOR NKYLOH

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#)
SUBJECT: DISASTER DECLARATION FOR CUBA - HURRICANE IKE

REF: HAVANA 722

¶1. (U) Hurricane Ike has wreaked havoc across eastern, central, and western Cuba as it traversed virtually the entire island from September 8-9. U.S. Interests Section personnel do not have direct access to these regions of Cuba, but have received reports from Cuban NGOs, international organizations, and foreign and Cuban media of serious damage to houses, other buildings, infrastructure, and agricultural production in these areas. These reports include almost every province of Cuba, ranging from Guantanamo in the extreme east to Pinar del Rio on the western tip of Cuba. Pinar del Rio province already was reeling from the devastating effects of Category 4 hurricane Gustav just ten days earlier.

¶2. (U) Accordingly, the Chief of Mission requests an additional \$500,000 in assistance from USAID/OFDA for emergency relief to these affected areas. In accordance with prior discussions with WHA/CCA, AID/LAC, and AID/OFDA, COM believes that the USG should consider providing this assistance through a USG contribution to the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), in response to the IFRC's September 9 appeal for \$5.8 million for relief programs in Cuba to address the needs of the population affected by hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Our understanding is that the IFRC would provide its assistance through the Cuban Red Cross affiliate, which reportedly has a network throughout Cuba. Because this would indirectly funnel USG assistance through GOC channels, there will need to be a policy decision made that the USG is prepared to take such a step given the exigent circumstances.

¶3. (SBU) The COM on September 10 signed separate agreements with Caritas and the Methodist Church in Cuba to provide \$80,000 and \$20,000 respectively in humanitarian assistance for the damages from hurricane Gustav. Both Caritas and the Methodist church have told USINT that they are re-evaluating their relief efforts in the wake of hurricane Ike but that they are not in position now to expand their current operations. Both organizations prefer to purchase locally their relief supplies, and Caritas in particular emphasized that it already has run into supply problems due to local scarcities. Both Caritas and the Methodist Church would be prime candidates for follow-on USG funding in addition to the \$500,000 for the IFRC once they have settled into their relief efforts and been able to plan

and build potential capacity for broader-based relief programs.

¶4. (SBU) In that regard, USINT urges discretion in avoiding references to Caritas and the Methodist Church in any public diplomacy regarding USG relief provided to Cuba via humanitarian organizations. Caritas is especially sensitive to any public reference to assistance it might receive from the USG, and in Havana avoids any discussion of USG assistance in public or over the telephone. Highlighting the roles of Caritas or the Methodist church as recipients of USG aid would draw unwelcome attention from the GOC and jeopardize their ability to work with us in the future.

¶5. (U) COM also requests the re-designation of an OFDA assessment team to travel to Cuba to assess additional humanitarian assistance requirements should the GOC change its position and accede to such a visit. USINT Havana appreciates OFDA assistance provided already for hurricane Gustav relief and looks forward to working with OFDA to address this latest humanitarian crisis.
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